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A Foot in the Door

Illinois/Chicago Film Office Announces Winners Of Screenwriting Competition

In the uber-competitive and complicated world of screenwriting, sometimes all a writer needs is to get their script on the right desk. Such is the goal of the Illinois/Chicago Film Offices and its seventh biennial Illinois/Chicago Screenwriting Competition. "We have pre-arranged [agreements] with directors at studios," says Rich Moskal, Director of the Chicago Film Office. "We are hoping to get these scripts in the hands of producers."

The 2006 Screenwriting Competition deemed three writers award-worthy: Cliff Zimowski for "Lunch and Learn," Frederick Mensch for "Bones" and Mike Houlihan for "Ballhawk." In addition to having their screenplay submitted to industry executives, each winner will receive a cash prize and a crystal trophy. "Getting this award could [be a] shortcut," says Moskal. "It helps them get their foot in the door."

Zimowski, of Lisle, IL, is a graduate of the Columbia College's film program. "Lunch and Learn" is the story of three fellow employees (a CEO, Human Resources manager and a company peon) who encounter a wild series of mishaps when their luncheon meeting goes horribly wrong. His immediate goals as a screenwriter are rather simple. "I want to get some stuff produced," says Zimowski. "I would like to see [the movie] produced in Chicago."

Mensch, of Palatine, IL, is a graduate of NYU Film School who moved to Los Angeles to pursue his movie-making dreams before returning to the Midwest. He operates a website for screenwriters (www.moviebytes.com). "Bones" is a spooky adventure movie aimed at children. "The movie is not real intense," says Mensch. "I would like to see something of mine made here in Chicago, get some activity here."

Houlihan, of Chicago, has had a long career in the entertainment industry, working as an actor, director, producer and playwright in addition to screenwriting. He recently completed the independent feature film "Tapioca" (www.tapiocathemovie.com). Like the other winners, Houlihan is straightforward in his goals. "I'd like to sell it," Houlihan says of his award-winning script. "I would like to write screenplays for a living."

Although the approximately 200 submissions were slightly lower than past years, Moskal says this year's screenwriting competition made up for the lack of quantity with quality. "The quality of the scripts [has] improved," says Moskal. "Writers are more savvy these days to what a screenplay needs to accomplish."